

FREEDOM FOR PABLO PACHECO AVILA

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Pablo Pacheco Avila, a prisoner of conscience in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Pacheco Avila works as an independent journalist with the agency Avileña Cooperative of Independent Journalists, because he believes it is his obligation to expose the factual realities of totalitarian Cuba.

Due to Mr. Pacheco Avila's desire to communicate the truth about the nightmarish reality of Castro's repressive regime, he has been constantly harassed by the dictator's thugs. According to Amnesty International, in November 2002, Mr. Pacheco Avila was detained by Castro's agents of repression for six hours after attempting to video two totalitarian police officers mistreating two women. In March 2002, he was detained for providing news coverage on a peaceful pro-democracy meeting.

Unfortunately, under the tyrannical dictatorship, freedom is banned and repression is law. Mr. Pacheco Avila was arrested in Castro's brutal March 2003 crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists. After a summary, sham trial he was sentenced to 20 years in the totalitarian gulag.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Pacheco Avila is a great example how the dictator torments and commits aggression against those who advocate for truth and democracy. Today marks the one year anniversary of Castro's infamous March 2003 crackdown on Cuba's prodemocracy activists. Amnesty International recognizes 75 prisoners of conscience from this condemnable March 2003 crackdown. Currently thousands of freedom-loving Cubans languish in Castro's totalitarian gulags because they refuse to accept the nightmarish oppression in Cuba. Today, I extend my solidarity to Mr. Pacheco Avila and the thousands of Cuban men and women who are shackled and suffering because they desire to see freedom reign in Cuba.

Mr. Pacheco Avila suffers today in an inhumane dungeon because he believes in writing and reporting the truth. My colleagues, on the one year anniversary of the brutal, March 2003 crackdown on pro-democracy activists in totalitarian Cuba, we must demand the immediate release of Pablo Pacheco Avila and every prisoner of conscience suffering in the gulags of totalitarian Cuba.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO RANDY AND CLARICY RUSK

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Randy and Claricy Rusk for the contributions they have made to their community and the State of Colorado. Recently, Randy and Claricy Rusk were presented the prestigious Leopold

Conservation Award for their land conservation efforts. It is with great satisfaction that I congratulate Randy and Claricy for their well-deserved award, and thank them for their significant contributions to Custer County and the State of Colorado.

For five generations, the Rusk Hereford Ranch has sought out progressive conservation techniques in range management. Their efforts include improved range and riparian management, wildlife habitat enhancement, resource management planning, and creating conservation easements to prevent second home development. The Leopold Conservation Award is named after famed conservationist Aldo Leopold, and includes a \$10,000 cash prize and a crystal statute of Aldo Leopold on horseback.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Rusks have a legacy of strong commitment to the ranching community in Custer County and the State of Colorado. Randy and Claricy's efforts to keep this great tradition of conservation vibrant is worthy of recognition before this body of Congress and this nation today. It is my privilege to extend to Randy and Claricy my sincere congratulations on receiving the Leopold Conservation Award, and to wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

TRIBUTE TO CATHY L. SCIORTINO, IRA D. CALVERT DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT

HON. KEN CALVERT

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and pay tribute to an individual whose dedication and contributions to the community of Corona, California are exceptional. Corona, and surrounding communities, has been fortunate to have dynamic and dedicated business and community leaders who willingly and unselfishly give their time and talent and make their communities a better place to live and work. Cathy Sciortino is one of these individuals. On March 27, 2004, Cathy will be honored at the annual YMCA Ira D. "Cal" Calvert Distinguished Service Awards Dinner.

Cathy was born in Akron, Ohio where she attended school and graduated from Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. After graduation, she worked for May Co. Corp. in Youngstown, Ohio for eleven years as a buyer of women's ready to wear clothing. In 1985, Cathy and her husband moved to Yorba Linda, California and a year later they bought a house in Corona.

After the birth of her first child, Carly, Cathy became a stay at home mom and was very active in the school system. She joined the PTA and served on the board for 14 years. In 1995, Cathy was elected to the Corona-Norco Unified School Board and served as the president in 1997-1998 and 2002-2003. She also served as the delegate for the California School Board Association Assembly and as the Corona-Norco School Board Representative. She has also served as a chairmember on the Corona Regional Medical Center Governing Board; was a founding member of the Unity Advisory Board; the Centennial High School PTSA President; board member of the Choices for Success advisory board; and board member of the ADV advisory board.

Cathy has been the recipient of the PTA-Honorary Service Award and the Soroptimist Woman of Distinction Award for Education.

Cathy has set a standard of excellence and commitment in his work in the community. Her tireless passion for community service has contributed immensely to the betterment of the community of Corona, California. Her involvement in the community makes me proud to call her a fellow community member, American and friend. I know that many community members are grateful for her service and salute her as she receives the Ira D. Calvert Distinguished Service Award.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. BECERRA. Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, March 16, 2004, I was unable to cast my floor vote on rollcall numbers 58, 59, and 60. The votes I missed include rollcall vote 58 on the Motion to Suspend the Rules and Agree to H. Res. 551, Thanking C-SPAN for its service to the House of Representatives; rollcall vote 59 on the Motion to Suspend the Rules and Pass H.R. 3733, the Myron V. George Post Office Designation; and rollcall vote 60 on the Motion to Suspend the Rules and Agree to H. Res. 433, Honoring the life and legacy of Luis A. Ferré.

Had I been present for the votes, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall votes 58, 59, and 60.

THE HELPING THE PEOPLE OF HAITI ACT

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Helping the People of Haiti Act, a bill to renew United States financial assistance to Haiti and to urge the international community to support Haiti's economic recovery.

As the international community intervenes to restore peace in Haiti, I encourage all of my colleagues to concern yourselves with the suffering of its people. The health and welfare of millions of Haitians and the stability of a region close to our shores will only get worse if we do not seize the opportunity to act responsibly now.

My bill, the Helping the People of Haiti Act, requires the Secretary of the Treasury to direct the U.S. Executive Director at the Inter-American Development Bank to release the loans already approved for Haiti. These funds, amounting to \$146 million, provide for health, education, water, sanitation, and transportation developments that are critical to stabilizing Haiti and improving the plight of its people. This bill also requires the Secretary of State to encourage foreign governments to strengthen their financial support and help with Haiti's economic development.

For too long, the United States and the international community did not intervene to

alleviate the situation in Haiti, conditioning financial assistance on the strengthening of democratic institutions, free and fair elections, and transparent and accountable government. But it is reasonable to assume that these requirements for financial aid will now be met, given the international community's intimate involvement in Haiti's political affairs for the near future.

Let us work to alleviate all of Haiti's problems—environmental degradation, extreme poverty, starvation, and social chaos—not just the political crisis. This is critical to stabilizing the country, preventing a mass exodus of refugees, and ensuring that future political crises will be weathered not by street violence but by the rule of law and democracy.

Mr. Speaker, where the United Nations once called Haiti a "silent emergency," the plight of this country screams out for our assistance. We have a moral imperative to uphold democracy in Haiti, and to ensure that Haiti's people do not starve, that the environment is not obliterated, and that instead Haiti will become a nation of stability and opportunity. Haiti is a success story waiting to happen.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO VIRGINIA ERICKSON

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today to pay tribute to Virginia Erickson for her selfless dedication to the community of New Castle, Colorado, and congratulate her on being recognized by the Garfield County Commissioners and the Glenwood Springs Post Independent as their 2003 Countywide Humanitarian of the Year. Virginia received this honor in recognition of her outstanding work with numerous civic organizations. It is an honor to pay tribute to Virginia for her well-deserved award, and her ongoing efforts to better her community.

As an active member of her community, Virginia dedicates her time to a vast array of civic functions. She serves as an emergency medical technician for the New Castle Volunteer Ambulance Service and as a member of the New Castle Historical Museum. An active advocate for New Castle seniors, Virginia also serves as a New Castle Councilwoman. Her enthusiasm for taking part in these organizations comes from the joy she receives in giving back to the community she loves.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to recognize Virginia before this body of Congress and this nation for her dedication and commitment to the New Castle, Colorado community. She has done much to improve her community, and I congratulate her on her recent honor as the 2003 Countywide Humanitarian of the Year. I wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

TRIBUTE TO WAYNE KEITH, IRA D. CALVERT DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT

HON. KEN CALVERT

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and pay tribute to an individual whose dedication and contributions to the community of Corona, California are exceptional. Corona, and surrounding communities, has been fortunate to have dynamic and dedicated business and community leaders who willingly and unselfishly give their time and talent and make their communities a better place to live and work. Wayne Keith is one of these individuals. On March 27, 2004, Wayne will be honored at the annual YMCA Ira D. "Cal" Calvert Distinguished Service Awards Dinner.

Wayne has been an active member of the community since he moved here in 1969. He began work as the general manager of ALCOA's Premium Casting Division in Corona. There is hardly an organization that hasn't benefited from his participation. Wayne has served as President of the Corona Rotary Club, the Western Municipal Water District and the Navy League. He has been on the Board of Directors of United Way, Corona Chamber of Commerce, Corona Community Hospital Foundation, UCR Foundation, Good Samaritan Boys Club and California Manufacturers Association.

A longtime member of the First Congregational Church, he has held a number of church positions from choir member to vice president of the board of directors. Wayne has also donated countless hours to Peppermint Ridge, serving three terms on its board of directors and chairing several committees. He also directed renovations of the Woman's Improvement Club clubhouse, and chaired fundraising activities for the Corona-Norco Family YMCA.

Wayne began his career in 1945 with ALCOA after receiving his B.S. in Mechanical Engineering. He stayed with ALCOA over 40 years. During his career he was active in professional associations, has written on the subject of aluminum, and is co-holder of a patent for stair treads.

For all his volunteer efforts, Wayne has been recognized with several awards. In 1975, he was named Citizen of the Year by the Corona Chamber of Commerce; received the Chamber's "George" Award; was chosen, along with his wife Evie, Corona Community Hospital Volunteers of the Year; and was recipient of the Golden Hinge Award—only the second one given—by Peppermint Ridge.

Wayne has set a standard of excellence and commitment in his work in the community. His tireless passion for community service has contributed immensely to the betterment of the community of Corona, California. His involvement in the community makes me proud to call him a fellow community member, American and friend. I know that many community members are grateful for his service and salute him as he receives the "Ira D. Calvert Distinguished Service Award."

LOW-INCOME TAXPAYER PROTECTION ACT OF 2004

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Mr. BECERRA. Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to introduce companion legislation to S. 685, a bill sponsored by Senator JEFF BINGAMAN (D-NM) and Senator DANIEL AKAKA (D-IL) to assist low-income taxpayers in preparing and filing their tax returns and to protect taxpayers from unscrupulous refund anticipation loan providers. In particular, the provisions of this legislation will benefit taxpayers eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) who must fill out dauntingly complex forms—the EITC instructions run 53 pages alone—and, because of the dearth of free tax preparation services to help navigate the process, are heavy users of commercial tax preparers.

The problems addressed by the Low-Income Taxpayer Protection Act of 2004 have been ignored for too long. The National Taxpayer Advocate's FY2002 Annual Report to Congress notes that in 2000, only 1 percent of filers with incomes below the EITC income limit received free tax preparation assistance from either the IRS Taxpayer Assistance Centers or volunteer sites affiliated with the IRS. The remaining low-income filers who had their forms filed for them used a commercial preparer. While many commercial preparers provide a very valuable, necessary service, the work of these men and women is too often overshadowed by those who peddle refund anticipation loans (RALs)—usurious short-term loans secured by the taxpayer's tax refund, including the EITC. In fact, it is estimated that 53 percent of EITC recipients who went to a paid tax preparer ended up with a RAL.

According to a report prepared by the Consumer Federation of America and the National Consumer Law Center and entitled "All Drain, No Gain," refund anticipation loan fees cost consumers about \$1.14 billion in 2002, up almost \$200 million from the year before. Additional fees for electronic filing, "document preparation," and "applications" added another \$406 million to the total. Our constituents who can afford it the least are suffering a \$1.5 billion drain on their tax refunds.

Mr. Speaker, let me take a moment to break down these estimates from the cumulative to the individual using an analysis found in "All Drain, No Gain." Based upon the prices for RALs in 2004, a consumer might pay the following in order to get a \$2,100 RAL—the average refund—from a commercial tax preparation chain this year: (1) A loan fee of \$99.95, which includes a \$24.95 fee supposedly for the "dummy" bank account used to receive the consumer's tax refund from the IRS to repay the RAL; and (2) a system administration fee that averages \$32 per loan. Combine that with tax preparation fees, which average about \$120, and the total is about \$250. The effective APR on this RAL would be 182 percent.

The Office of the Taxpayer Advocate acknowledges that there are several factors that drive low-income taxpayers to pay for tax preparation, including: (1) Inconvenient location or hours of VITA sites; (2) lack of bank accounts for direct deposit of refunds; (3)